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Book Reviews

THE IDEAL OF JESUS

The latest book of Professor Clarke's¹ is an inspiring continuation of the fascinating and instructive development of theological thought which he has recorded in his theological writings and has put in such charming biographical form in his *Sixty Years with the Bible*. Professor Clarke began with the belief that we must look to the past for our information as to the nature of Christianity, that in the Bible we have formulated for all time the essential doctrines of the Christian faith and the program for a Christian life. Little by little he was forced to recognize the vitality of present religious life and to admit the claims of present experience to a hearing. Finally, in his book *The Use of the Scriptures in Theology* he reduced the canon of Christian thinking from Scripture as such to the Mind of Christ. That is definitely Christian which accords with Christ's view of truth. The authority of the past was definitely limited and was so spiritualized as to seem vague in content as contrasted with the older dogmatic systems. The present book reveals the tremendous positive power of an interpretation of Christianity which bases faith not on a fixed authority from the past but on the promise of the future. What Professor Clarke expounds is not the dogmatic system of Jesus, not even the ideas of Jesus, but his *ideal*. Christianity therefore is to be found not in any finished system but in the never-finished forward-reaching vision of the better life for mankind which may come through discipleship to Jesus. The essence of our religion is therefore located in the realm of the will rather than in that of the intellect.

This conception of the task leads him to emphasize the spiritual values rather than the technical problems of the New Testament records. Scholars who are conversant with the critical questions now so prominent will miss some of the queries which they have been accustomed to judge fundamental. There is no attempt to estimate accurately the historical status of the sources of our knowledge. There is almost no discrimination made between the different points of view of the different evangelists. It is true, the author confines himself to the Synoptics, recognizing that in the Fourth Gospel the utterances "have been consciously recast

¹ *The Ideal of Jesus*. By WILLIAM NEWTON CLARKE. New York: Scribner, 1911. 329 pages. \$1.50 net.

by another mind" and therefore "cannot rightly be used for the purpose of setting forth the actual ideal of the living Jesus himself" (p. 13). That a similar recasting of the thought of Jesus may have taken place to some extent in the Synoptics is indeed admitted, but this consideration does not prevent the use of the synoptic sayings as bona fide utterances of Jesus. Professor Clarke feels that for the discovery of the *ideal* of Jesus such critical problems as those with which New Testament scholars are now engaged may be ignored. "There is no doubt whatever as to what he [Jesus] stood for." . . . "There is no ambiguity about his position" (p. 8). This ignoring of minute critical questions enables the author to write with a refreshing freedom from technical detail; but it likewise leads him unconsciously to blend his own ideals with those of the New Testament so as to secure consistency. This shifting from one position to another is especially conspicuous in the crucial chapter on the "Kingdom of God." He is here undertaking to discover what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God. But instead of a critical examination of the historical connotation of the phrase, he proceeds to shift the inquiry to a totally different field. He asks instead the question, "What sort of a kingdom actually came as a consequence of Jesus' life and teaching?" This is, of course, an important question, and one which will have large value in determining the actual significance of the life of Jesus for us. But it is quite conceivable that the ideal of the kingdom which Jesus consciously held was not identical with the actual outcome of Christian history. The *non-sequitur* of this method is evident in a paragraph on p. 72, where, after summing up the three characteristics of the kingdom which *actually came*, he says, "Or, to put the three into one, the kingdom of God is the embodiment of the *ideal that Jesus held*." Another illustration of his short and easy way of disposing of difficulties is found in his discussion of the beatitudes. He does not think it essential to decide whether the Matthean or the Lukan form is nearer to the ideal of Jesus. "Either of the two sayings corresponds to the ideal of Jesus. They do not contradict each other in any vital way, and he may perfectly well have uttered them both" (p. 237).

The book therefore is in no sense a contribution to exact historical knowledge concerning Jesus. It ignores or evades the very questions which the historian must face. But the service which it renders to the cause of the religion of Jesus is far greater than could be furnished by any minute historical criticism. It is an appreciation of Jesus by one who has found in him complete satisfaction of the yearning of the soul for the highest revelation of human possibilities. It is precisely this quality

of personal devotion which gives to Professor Clarke's exposition that sensitiveness to the spiritual significance of the teachings of Jesus which makes them shine with rare luminousness. The reader feels that the book is the outcome of years of intimate communion with the marvelous figure portrayed in the gospels rather than of the more objectively correct but more spiritually barren method of literary criticism. The topics of the chapters reveal how truly Professor Clarke has reflected the emphasis of Jesus himself. Such themes as "The Kingdom of God," "Righteousness," "The Filial Life," "Deliverance from Evil," "Liberty" reveal how admirably the concrete interests of Jesus are apprehended. Each topic is discussed by citing and explaining typical incidents or teachings which illustrate the ideal underlying what Jesus did or said. One cannot read these chapters without feeling that there is nothing in all the world so glorious as to confess allegiance to the ideal of Jesus and no task so rich in spiritual returns as to be a messenger of this marvelous gospel. The book ought to prove an immense stimulus to pastors, and should show its influence in promoting a type of preaching which will appeal with searching power to men. When under the spell of this profound spiritual appreciation of Jesus, the reader is quite willing to forego critical defects. For after all, there is a convincingness about the ardent testimony of this modern disciple of Christ which preserves the spirit of the New Testament writings with rare fidelity.

The last three chapters of the book deal with "Christianity," "The Church," and "Society." Here the practical application of the study comes to expression. If we want to discover what Christianity is we have only to ask what sort of life would result from the ideal of Jesus. Instead of attempting to discover what beliefs Jesus made binding on the church, we ask what would be the practical outcome if men were to live under the sway of his ideal of filial trust in God and of the spirit of loving ministry to one another. Such a putting of the problem removes the last vestiges of dogmatism from Christian theology and ethics and opens the path for genuine progress in the forms of Christian thought and action while preserving the inspiration which springs from an enthusiastic adoration of Jesus as the supreme revelation of the way of life. As might be expected, the result is a humble and honest confession that the ways of men are far from being what Jesus would wish. A more potent revelation of the personal and social sins which we are complacently committing has seldom come from a Christian teacher. But it comes as the inevitable result of a deeper appreciation of the ideal of Jesus, and is accompanied by a message of hope for those who believe

that Jesus points the way to the better future toward which his disciples must strive. A Christianity such as that expounded in this book can never be antiquated. It marks the dawn of a new era of conquering faith in the name of Jesus.

GERALD BIRNEY SMITH

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

CHRIST AND COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Modern research has disclosed many and varied religious notions in the life of the ancient orient. Not only Jews but also Babylonians, Egyptians, Phrygians, Syrians, Greeks, Romans, in fact all peoples of that ancient world, were exceedingly religious. This was the world in which Jesus and the apostles lived, hence the query is often raised today, What influence had the surrounding religions upon the formation of Christianity? Recent extremists have said that this source supplied practically everything contained in Christianity, even the figure of Jesus himself. Others less extreme think Jesus as portrayed in the gospels has been freely decked out with borrowed ideas, though he was an actual person. So it happens that one of the liveliest phases of New Testament study today is the question of Christianity's connection, particularly in its thought of Jesus, with contemporary ethnic faiths.

But one who seeks in Valensin's lectures¹ help upon this problem will be frequently disappointed. The author is not mainly concerned to sift the traditional data regarding Jesus in order to discover their genetic relationships; his interest is in claiming that the doctrine of Christ's person is not affected by the modern comparative study of religions. The result is a strictly traditional christological apologetic bearing the *imprimatur* of the Roman church. Two premises for the discussion are laid down in the opening lecture. These are the fact of the supernatural Christ attested in the existence of the supernatural church, and the refusal to treat the history of Christianity from the evolutionary point of view. Having so defined the problem as to guarantee the conclusion desired, the author examines some phases of the Babylonian religion, of Buddhism, of the syncretistic Graeco-Roman faiths, and of Jewish Messianism. He concludes with a lecture on "Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life"—the culmination of God's revelation of himself to humanity.

SHIRLEY JACKSON CASE

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

¹ *Jésus-Christ et l'étude comparée des religions*. Conférences données aux facultés catholiques de Lyon. Par ALBERT VALENSIN. Paris: Gabalda et Cie., 1911. Pp. 232. Fr. 3.